DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 026 SO 013 095

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TITLE Up Front Among the Down-Home Natives: The Anthropology of Teaching Introductory Anthropology.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 13p.; Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (77th, Los Angeles, CA, November 17, 1978).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anthropology: Higher Education: Introductory Courses: *Teacher Effectiveness: *Teaching Methods: Undergraduate Study

ABSTRACT

Effective teaching of college level introductory courses in anthropology should include techniques used by anthropologists themselves. An effective learning environment is first achieved by having respect for one's discipline, for students, and for the processes of learning and intellectual development. Once the environment has been established, one strategy which could be employed is the "Tribal-Elder Fieldwork Strategy." Instructors should imagine themselves as tribal leaders in charge of transmitting exciting tribal traditions. Also, even in the classroom, students can be placed in the roles of participant observers and the instructor could play the role of informant. In another variation the teacher could pass around artifacts and let the students determine their use. Finally, the students should be encouraged to become informants who share what they know with the instructor. An important element in this process is the instructor's recognition and support of student endeavors. (KC)

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UP FRONT AMONG THE DOWN-HOME NATIVES:

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF TEACHING INTRODUCTORY ANTHROPOLOGY [1]

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This paper deals with some of the things we don't dare admit to our colleagues for fear of exposing our inner-most soft spots. It examines a topic more challenging (if that is possible) than obtaining a preferred parking spot on campus, more mystical than a university budget, and more awe-inspiring than fieldwork in faraway places. It is, in short, a commentary on teaching members of our own culture the basic insights of Anthropology.

One of the most important forums for transmitting anthropological insights is the Introductory course. Here, teachers encounter students who may never again have an opportunity to study Anthropology, as well as those who might pursue the subject further if their interest can be sufficiently aroused. A survey of U.S. institutions by Bruner, Spindler, and Werner (1963) found that although objectives for courses in Introductory Anthropology are quite standard, course content and teaching styles are determined by individual instructors. The present paper explores attitudes and techniques which have proven helpful for at least one participant in what has been termed the most amazing adventure of the twentieth century, or the teaching of Introductory Anthropology. Academic content under consideration includes a general survey of Anthropology and its subfields over the period of a full year, or seven months in the Canadian system. Classroom situations

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serving as a backdrop for the current discussion include enrollments of about thirty to more than seven hundred students of mixed ages and backgrounds. In Ontario, Canada, a wide variety of types of students in Introductory Anthropology (and other courses) has resulted from Provincial Government policy emphasizing the availability of higher education for adults throughout their lifetimes. For example, mature people attending university on either a full-time or a part-time basis are almost completely integrated with younger students, and people over the age of sixty receive free tuition at some universities. As a result of government policy, it is normal to have undergraduate (and even graduate) classes composed of people of many different ages, occupations, and ethnic backgrounds. This situation demands considerable flexibility from instructors who hope to teach the basics of their discipline to students representing a mosaic of of ages and interests. Ideally, instructors facing this challenge should be packed full of humour, ingenuity, and presence of mind.

Before proceeding further, let us first examine a few general comments about effective university teaching. These observations combine Anthropological insights with those of allied fields in much the same way as Anthropology borrows whatever works or is useful, and then incorporates approaches from a large number of disciplines into its own methodology.

First, the basis of successful teaching at any level is a teacher's attitide. Attitudes organize behaviour, and an effective teaching attitude helps create a successful learning

environment for students in any setting. In other words, one literally establishes a milieu which can promote effective learning through one's attitude towards teaching, towards students, and towards the subject matter presented. Details of an effective teaching attitude are best learned by observing great teachers and then teaching under rigorous conditions for several years, but it is also possible to describe the components of such an attitude.

The first component of an effective teaching attitude is the notion that teaching is a privilege. Teaching students of any age is a privilege, but teaching university students is especially exciting because at this level, it is possible to show people how to begin to use their minds at full capacity for the first time. No other profession accomplishes this task as thoroughly or as well.

Van Doren (1958) noted that there is no parallel in life to the excitement of learning who we are and what our minds can do. Thus, the main privilege of university teaching is the opportunity to help students discover their own minds, and to see that this difficult but exciting task is pleasurable and done well. Although as teachers we will never know the exact consequences of our work, we can be reassured by the thought that our efforts somehow increase the amount of mind in a world which can never have too much of that commodity."

Another, very closely related component of an effective teaching attitude is respect. By this is meant a kind of "cultural relativity" which includes respect for one's discipline, for students, and for the processes of learning and intellectual development.

Respect should be so basic to a teacher's thinking that it is immediately apparent to students when one enters a classroom on the first day of class. At the same time, students should be equally aware of the fact that the teacher demands reciprocal respect from them. Considerable experimentation has shown this observer that it is possible to establish an attitude of respect from the beginning by first making eye contact with students, and then silently but deliberately requesting respect while organizing one's notes or otherwise preparing to utter an opening sentence. This technique was developed after reading literature on primate behaviour, including observations on general social gestures and the socialization of juveniles.

As a university course proceeds, the results of reciprocal respect become clear. It is not wise to make a production out of demanding respect, because the teacher who does so runs the risk of creating exactly the opposite result. Instead, it is sufficient to realize that by its simple presence, respect serves a vital function in teaching. Not to be confused with "tolerating nonsense," teacher respect is part of an emotional support system which helps counteract the difficulties of learning and intellectual development for students of any age in any culture. Learning and intellectual growth are emotionally and physically demanding activities which require courage; a teacher's legitimate respect for the learning process establishes an effective learning environment by providing important backing for intellectual growth. Once established, the attitude of respect requires little extra time or energy on the part of students and teachers, and is

effective for all types of classroom situations. By the same token, one of the most serious errors a faculty member can make is to "compete" with students, since competing with them can undermine, or even destroy their self-esteem.

Returning to the subject of Introductory Anthropology, instructors of Anthropology can benefit from the direct application of "the Anthropology of Anthropology" to classroom situations. Because Anthropology is a unique discipline with unique methodologies, it makes sense to apply the methodologies which Anthropologists have invented for teaching ourselves about others to teaching others what we have learned as a result of these methodologies. In other words, anthropological methodologies which help clarify human behaviour should in some way or another facilitate the transmission of insights gained through their use. This is in fact the case.

One technique for applying anthropological methodologies to the teaching of Introductory Anthropology might be called the "Tribal Elder-Fieldwork Strategy." As a first step in carrying out this strategy, instructors should imagine themselves as tribal elders in charge of transmitting exciting tribal traditions (e.g. everyone knows that tribal elders were placed on earth to show others what we know, so while we're here, we might as well enjoy our role as much as possible). In my experience, the best approach along these lines is to encourage the initiates to think that learning Anthropology is their own original idea. Students should <u>never</u> suspect that learning about Anthropology is not their own original idea until it is too late, and if possible, they should

never suspect this at all. Also, students should never suspect that learning Anthropology is a strategy which is carefully planned by tribal elders in charge of their intellectual development. To avoid being "detected," instructors can resort to at least one basic rule (Molohon): "Never tell students what they should learn when you can show them, and if you must tell them, try to show them and tell them at the same time." As one example, showing students how Anthropology works by applying fieldwork methodologies to Introductory courses helps re-create some of the same excitement about tribal secrets which we once felt as students. One of the most obvious of these applications is to place students in the role of participant observers. While we cannot send students out into the field as often as we would like, we can transform ourselves into informants whom students may observe as we appear to discover anthropological insights for the first time. Thus, when introducing the subject of kinship, instructors can lead students through a step by step discovery of the principles of kinship instead of simply telling them about kinship. This is easily accomplished by describing one's own discovery of a kinship system during fieldwork while stealthily appearing to reminisce about a mere curiosity: "When I was working with the X, a grown woman mentioned her four year-old 'father.' I then had to draw a kinship chart which looked like this in order to understand what the woman meant." A kinship chart is then sketched on the board while the instructor delivers a running commentary which is geared towards student participation:

"If this relative here is called 'A,' what do you suppose this relative over here is called?" Efforts on the part of students to participate should be favourably received: "That's very good," or "That's close, but this relative was actually called 'C'." Soon the kinship chart is complete, and students will usually continue to ask questions, including such standard enquiries as: "What happens when the mother doesn't have a brother?" If the response which this technique inspires is compared to the lack of attention which sometimes accompanies the introduction of difficult subjects in Anthropology, its value becomes clear. Furthermore, although the example given here is kinship, this technique works equally well for introducing many other subjects.

Yet another variation along these same lines occurs when instructors invite students to share in their excitement as they "encounter" new discovery after new discovery. For example, an instructor can introduce the topic of early stone tools by passing around a fragment of an actual stone tool, together with a similar piece of rock which was shaped by natural forces, and asking students to decide which piece of rock is a tool, and which is simply a piece of rock. For very large classes where it is often too difficult to pass artifacts all the way around in order to give everyone an opportunity to handle them before beginning a discussion, instructors can approach students sitting in the front row or elsewhere and ask their advice. Again (as with fieldwork interviews), all reasonable efforts on the part of students to participate should be rewarded with verbal praise: "That is a fine suggestion (point, observation, question, etc.), and I'm glad you brought it up. This brings up another point

about why... Why do you think...? Do you think this might have been...? You do? By golly, you're right! We may have discovered something here!" This strategy at first leads students to the suspicion that learning Anthropology can be fun, and shortly thereafter to the firm belief that learning Anthropology is their own original idea. The latter point in the intellectual development of students is often marked by two phenomena: A) Students will remain quietly in their seats for a few minutes at the end of a lecture in order to think about what they have discovered, and only then rise slowly out of their seats and begin to leave (compare this with an increase in fidgeting as the lecture draws to a close, followed by a rush for the door), and B) Students begin informing the instructor about "new" facts or principles which the instructor has previously taught them. As soon as these and other indications of intellectual development begin to appear, it is the instructor's job to see that students keep their attention on the essential questions in Anthropology. The essential questions are more important than any answers we may have, because answers can change or may not even exist, while the essential questions in Anthropology seldom wear out with use (cf. Van Doren, 1958). In essence, the goals of a course in Introductory Anthropology should be to give students an overview of the discipline, and to leave them with a set of essential questions which they can take with them and use for the rest of their lives.

At this stage of the carefully planned development of students' minds, a fieldwork technique which has already been introduced should be intensified. This technique is the notion that students

should be encouraged to become informants who share what they know with the teacher (Anthropologist), and also with the rest of the class when class size permits. Although some students are already informing the instructor about what they know, it is now time to intensify this trend. "Encouraged sharing" may be handled in various ways depending on class size and other variables. Smaller classes are more amenable to discussion than large classes, and classroom comments must be contained within reasonable limits in order to avoid interference with time needed for scheduled lecture material. In addition, student comments must be gently guided so that they remain "on track," or that is, relevant to the material at hand. As is the case with fieldwork, it is important for an instructor to be prepared for anything. Instructors must likewise be prepared to be enthusiastic about material which although "ancient history," is new to students. If a student brings a newspaper clipping, a stone tool, or some other artifact to class, it is wise to invite the student to share this contribution with the rest of the class by announcing it to the class and inviting the student to say a few words. If the student is shy, an instructor can help by asking further questions and by offering recognition for this important effort. As is the case with teacher respect, legitimate recognition is part of a generalized support system which facilitates intellectual growth and development. Moreover, although university students are working towards a much different level of cognitive achievement than youngsters, basic needs for support remain constant throughout growth and development. Thus, a seventy-five year old will respond as eagerly

to praise as a five-year old. And, since students need to know where they stand, legitimate feedback about student progress facilitates the learning process. By the same token, an instructor who fails to express legitimate recognition for student progress may be resented for the simple reason that human beings resent not having what they need.

In conclusion, the application of fieldwork techniques and related methodologies to the process of teaching members of our own culture the basic insights of Anthropology can be a successful teaching technique. During these times of a buyer's market in higher education, the exchange of ideas about effective teaching is more important than ever. It may well be that the future of higher education will depend, at least in part, on our ability to perform as well or better over the long-term "haul" as we did in the past when there were greater financial resources. But since Anthropologists have traditionally been people who can "make do" with available resources, we may not find this situation devastating. In fact, we may find that it stimulates a wider application and more intensive development of our unique methodologies.

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